

## CHANDI DI VAR

(the Ballad of goddess Chandi)  
or, to give it its exact title,

Var Sri BHAGAUTI Ji Ki,  
by GURU Gobind SINGH  
and included in the Dasam GRANTH,

is the story of the titan tic contest between Chandi and other gods on the one hand and the demons on the other. The poem allegorizes the eternal conflict between good and evil. The source of the legend is "Devi mahatmya," a section of the Markandeya purana, and the narrative follows, in the main, the classical detail though the dominant interest lies in the character of Chandi which, through the creative genius of the poet attains reality and firmness belying its mythical origin. The Var, in PUNJABI, is one of the trilogy of poems about Chandi in the DASAM GRANTH, the other two being in Braj. Chandi, the eight armed goddess, consort of Siva, the god of destruction in the Hindu mythology, is also known by the name of Durga or Bhagauti. This last name has multiple connotations: it stands for goddess Chandi as well as for the sword, which, according to Guru Gobind Singh, is the symbol of power (sakti) and ultimately of Akal, the Timeless One Himself. SIKHISM is strictly monotheistic and Guru Gobind Singh, like his nine spiritual predecessors, promoted belief in the One Formless God, excluding all incarnations and images. He

chose the Pauranic story of Durga's valorous fight against the demons for its martial import.

The Var opens with an invocation to God symbolized as sword and then to the first nine Gurus or preceptors of the SIKH faith. The story begins with the demons overthrowing the gods and establishing their own sway where once the gods ruled. The Satyuga, the age of truth, is past and it is now the time of notso righteous Treta. Great discords prevail in the world; Narada famous for his ability to stir up passions is abroad. The gods in their helplessness turn to Mount Kailash where lives Durga.

Their leader, King INDRA, supplicates the goddess for help: "Thy shelter we seek. Goddess Durgshah!" Riding her demon devouring lion, Durga at once sets out to annihilate the evildoers. A fierce battle ensues, and the heavens are torn by the beating of drums, blowing of shells and the piercing cries of war. The sun becomes invisible in the dazzling brilliance of shiny swords and spears. In the awesome confusion of battle, the warriors fall to the ground, in agony, like drunken madmen. Those pierced with spears lie motionless like olives on the branch of the tree. The fallen heroes look like so many domes and turrets struck down by lightning. The demons fight with dreadful determination and not one of them has been seen fleeing the field. Their womenfolk watch the bloody scene from their towers, amazed at the

goddess's wondrous valour. Durga's sword seems dancing in her hand raining death on the dauntless foe. The demons, full of wrath, close in upon her roaring like the black clouds. The mighty Mahkhasur comes in great fury, but Durga smites him with such force that her sword, breaking the helmet to pieces and piercing through the body of the rider, the horse and the earth, rests on the horns of the bullock (who supports the earth).

The Queen, upon her stately lion, tears through the battle ranks of the demons demolishing them with her deathly sword. "Durga, with God's grace, has won the day." Restoring to the gods their lost kingdom, she returns. But the troubles of the gods are not yet ended. The demons again rally under their chiefs, Sumbha and Nisumbha, and march upon the kingdom of Indra. The gods are again undone and are forced to seek Durgshah's help. The goddess is ready for another battle. Chandi another name for Durga in the poem flashes upon the battle's dread array like lightning. Warlike heroes such as Lochana Dhumra come forward to match the goddess's prowess, but they all fall to her fatal sword one by one. Sumbha sends out fresh armies to face the fight. The goddess meets them with an angry charge of arrows sending many a hero to eternal sleep. It is now the turn of another, Sranvat Bij, who brings a mighty host of ironclad, vengeful soldiers. Durga mounts the lion as she hears the fiendish din and, flourishing the mace of battle in her hand, leads her army on. But deathless

is Sranvat Bij. As the drops of his blood fall to the ground, hosts of demons arise from them to join the strife. Many more are born every instant than Durga and the gods can destroy. The goddess, in a rage, remembers Kali, who bursts forth from her forehead in a flame of fire. Durga and Kali both spread ruin in the enemy's ranks with their blood washed swords.

At last, Sranvat Bij is surrounded and "the swords around him look like a crowd of fair maidens eagerly gathered to see a newly arrived bridegroom." Kali drinks the blood falling from Durga's blows so that no drop touches the earth, thus preventing the birth of more demon warriors. Great is Sumbha's anguish when he learns of Sranvat Bij's death. The wrathful demons prepare for revenge. The firm earth trembles under the marching heroes like a vessel upon stormy seas. But resistless is Durgshah on the field of battle. She cuts up the foemen like a hewer cuts the twigs. Those who were never tired of fighting have had more than their fill today. Mounting his fiery steed comes Nisumbha with a heavy bow he had specially sent for from Multan. But before he can take aim, a deadly blow from Durgshah's sword bears him down. The same fate awaits Sumbha. Seeing their chief's fall in this manner, the demons raise a loud howl of woe. They leave their horses and fly with weeds of grass in their mouths in token of surrender. Durgshah restores to Indra his crown. "Hail to Jagmat the Universal Mother," cry all the worlds. Durga emerges from this account triumphant, high spirited and glorious. She is the

symbol of divine power and justice. To the virtuous, she is a ready and kindly friend and protector. In Chandi di Var, the different names used for the goddess are Durgshah, Chandi, Devita, Rani, Bhavani, Jagmat and Maha Mai the Great Mother.

The chief point of Chandi di Var lies in its warlike temper which is evoked by a succession of powerful and eloquent similes and a dignified, echoic music of the richest timbre. The poem, though not the size of a true epic, has a remarkable breadth of sweep and intensity and a heightening rhythmical tempo with well-marked climactic patterns. On the reader's mind it makes a stirring and invigorating impact.

NAMDHARIS and NIHANGS, among SIKHS, especially include it in their daily devotion and derive much inspiration and spirit from reciting it.